



**Figure 1. Complete pedestal vessel from Madisonville site, Hamilton County, Ohio. Photo courtesy of J. B. Griffin, University of Michigan.**

# PEDESTAL VESSELS IN THE EASTERN UNITED STATES

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper presents a short history and current discussion on the pedestal vessel found in the Eastern United States. A short description and illustrations of these ceramic types are included in the paper.

The cultural shock created by the contact between European explorers and traders and the aboriginal Indian population of the eastern United States occurred so quickly and was so traumatic that few aspects of the aboriginal material cultures display gradual or transitional stylistic changes. Flint arrow points, for example, seem to have given way quickly to metal arrow points and guns, while pottery was rapidly replaced by copper and brass kettles as soon as such trade goods could be obtained.

There are many exceptions to such a generalization, of course, and one of the most interesting is the apparent adoption by proto-Historic Indians of the "chalice" or "goblet" form in their ceramics. So-called "pedestal vessels" are very rare in the eastern United States, less than a half-dozen examples being known; but these seem to occur consistently on Contact Period sites, ranging from Missouri to eastern Pennsylvania.

John W. Griffin (1945) was the first archeologist to suggest that these pedestal vessels are deliberate copies of European chalice or goblet forms. Earlier workers such as Holmes (1903) had believed that the specimens then known from Ohio's Madisonville Site (Fort Ancient culture, Hamilton County) were imitations of Middle Mississippi vessels from the south or west. When Griffin suggested that the Madisonville pedestal vessels and a similar example from Ontario were copies of European goblet or chalice forms (possibly even the communion chalice), Fenenga (1945) was quick to comment that current workers had overlooked the occurrence of a pedestal vessel in the Late Prehistoric Middle Mississippi "St. Francis" complex of eastern Missouri. Although the precise age of the "St. Francis" manifestation was not known, other than that it was late in the Missouri sequence, Fenenga emphasized the lack of European trade goods and concluded that, "It seems unnecessary to postulate a European form as the inspiration for the pedestal-based vessels from Madisonville, since there exists at least one aboriginal model in a culture from which Fort Ancient borrowed."

Recently, two additional examples of pedestal vessels have been discovered in Pennsylvania. A small historic Monongahela Complex site in southwestern Pennsylvania has been excavated by members of the Waynesburg Chapter of the Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology, notably Mr. and Mrs. James Hennan. It was the Hennans who discovered the broken pedestal vessel shown in Figure 2. The site has also yielded cut-out brass salamander pendants, which connect this Monongahela site with Fort Ancient-like "Clover Complex" sites on the upper reaches of the Ohio River, and other trade goods. The Hennan vessel is unusual in the shortness of the pedestal, but its relationship to the Madisonville vessels is unmistakable. Through the courtesy of Dr. James B. Griffin, University of Michigan, the one complete Madisonville pedestal vessel is illustrated in Figure 1. This pedestal vessel is unique in having strap handles, though it is possible that the broken Hennan vessel also had them. Two fragmentary pedestal vessels are also known from the

Historic component at the Madisonville Site.

In 1970 Dr. Barry Kent, Pennsylvania state archeologist, William Penn Memorial Museum, recovered another complete pedestal vessel from an Historic site (33 Yo 170) along the Susquehanna River, York County, Pennsylvania. As at Madisonville, this vessel was found with a burial. The Kent vessel lacks strap handles but has low subangular castellations and is cord-marked; it may be a Fort Ancient trade vessel or an indigenous copy of a Fort Ancient vessel.

These two recent finds of pedestal vessels on Historic sites go far to sustain Griffin's thesis that this ceramic form is derived from European models. The "score," as it now stands, is Historic sites, 5; "purely Indian," 1 (Ontario); "Middle Mississippi phase" (late Late Prehistoric or Historic St. Francis complex), 1.

Although J. W. Griffin states that the pedestal vessels from Ohio "can hardly be considered related to the annular bases and occasional pedestal-like bases of Middle Mississippi vessels," Fenenga seems to be correct in relating the Fort Ancient pedestal vessels to Middle Mississippi occurrences (such as that illustrated in Figure 3), and one can easily derive the Pennsylvanian Monongahela Complex and Susquehanna River specimens from Fort Ancient. Fenenga may be further from the mark, however, in denying a European model for these forms, and J. W. Griffin may be incorrect in discarding the possibility of a direct relationship between the pedestal vessels and Middle Mississippi "annular" vessels.

For one thing, the recently discovered Hennan vessel, with its extremely short base, is morphologically intermediate between the typical pedestal vessel and the annular vessel. It is quite possible that only the rarity of such specimens prevents us from having a more completely gradational series of such vessel forms. The annular vessel illustrated in Figure 4 comes from a McPherson County, Kansas, village site that has also yielded evidence of contact with Europeans, specifically, a piece of chain mail (Fig. 5) that has permitted speculation that this site was visited by Coronado's expedition in 1542 (Udden 1900; see also, Saylor (1973) "Chain Mail in Kansas," *Popular Archaeology*, v. 2, no. 1). On the other hand, the annular base occurs on unquestionable prehistoric vessels in the Arkansas and Missouri area, and as early as 500 B.C. in Louisiana and northwest Florida. It thus appears to represent a long ceramic tradition in the south, a tradition which may well have developed into the pedestal vessel form by Contact times. So, we are left in the archeologist's usual dilemma, having to choose between diffusion and independent invention. Were the aborigine's influenced by European ceramic or metal goblets, or did they just "happen" to be making pedestal vessels during Contact times?

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Figure 2. Two views of a broken pedestal vessel from a Monongahela Complex village site, southwestern Pennsylvania. Photo courtesy of James Randolph, Waynesburg College, and Mr. and Mrs. James Hennen.



Figure 3. "St. Francis" Complex pedestal vessel from Missouri-Arkansas area. Drawings from A. J. Conant, 1879, "Foot-prints of Vanished Races in the Mississippi Valley."

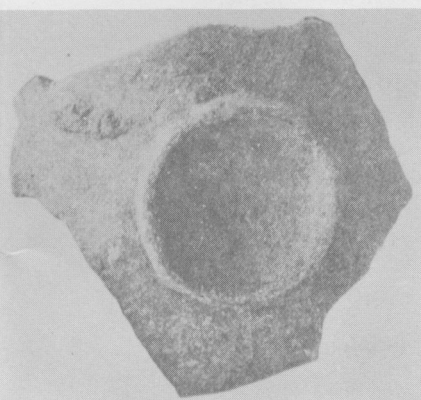


Figure 4. Base of "annular" vessel from McPherson County, Kansas, village site. From J. A. Udden, 1900, "An Old Indian Village."

Figure 5 (Right)  
Chain mail fragment  
from Udden's "old  
village site,"  
McPherson, Kansas

